



**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

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Fact Sheet

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Transition Assistance in the VA Military Services Program

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has a long history of special efforts to bring information on VA benefits and services to active duty military personnel.

These efforts include counseling about VA benefits through the Transition Assistance Program (TAP), a nationally coordinated federal effort to assist military men and women to ease the transition to civilian life through employment and job training assistance. A second component of the program, the Disabled Transition Assistance Program (DTAP), helps servicemembers separated for medical reasons.

More recently, VA has launched special efforts to provide a "seamless transition" for those returning from service in Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. Internal coordination was improved and efforts currently focus on reducing red tape and streamlining access to all VA benefits. Each VA medical facility and benefits regional office has identified a point of contact to coordinate activities locally and to assure that the needs of these returning combat servicemembers and veterans are met, and that additional contact is made should the veteran relocate. In addition, VA increased the staffing of benefits counselors at key military hospitals where severely wounded service members from Iraq and Afghanistan are frequently sent. Further details about the initiatives for today's veterans of the war on terrorism are described at www.va.gov/OPA/fact/returning_vets.html, and general information for these newest veterans is available on a special VA web page at www.vba.va.gov/EFIF.

Even before beginning the TAP pilot program in 1990, VA put a high priority on outreach to military members nearing separation from active duty. From its inception, VA has applied a broader definition to its military services outreach, called the VA Military Services Program.

While TAP and DTAP are the centerpieces, the broader definition encompasses pre-separation and retirement briefings, outreach to Reserve and National Guard units, and liaison and counseling services with various military post activities such as personal affairs, community affairs, and education offices.

VA also operates a growing Benefits Delivery at Discharge program that assists servicemembers at participating military bases with development of VA disability compensation claims prior to their discharge. This fosters continuity of care between the military and VA systems and speeds up VA's processing of their application for compensation. The pre-discharge physical is conducted under VA disability examination protocols either by VA medical centers, contract medical examiners or military personnel.

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Program Began with 1989 Pilot

The Veterans Benefits Amendments of 1989 (PL 101-237) provided for a three-year pilot program of transition assistance conducted jointly by VA, the Department of Defense (DOD) and the Department of Labor (DOL). The program provided separating servicemembers employment assistance, job training assistance and other transitional services, including counseling on VA benefits and services.

The DTAP program for disabled servicemembers offers personalized employment assistance and vocational rehabilitation counseling normally conducted at major military medical centers where such separations occur.

The Department of Army has implemented its own version of transition services, the Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP). There are dozens of ACAP sites both in the United States and overseas. The Army also operates a website at www.armyds3.org featuring special services for today's combat veterans intended to help severely disabled soldiers and their families cut through red tape so they can more easily tap into services available to them through the military and Department of Veterans Affairs. The Disabled Soldier Support System — DS3 for short — gives wounded soldiers an additional way to seek out the help or information they need until they can return to active duty or receive a medical retirement from the Army.

Benefits and Entitlements

VA's goal for TAP services is to ensure that servicemembers are aware of their VA benefits and to provide assistance as needed. For those leaving active duty due to medical problems, the outreach effort is intensified to ensure a full understanding of the VA compensation process and vocational rehabilitation and employment programs.

TAP participation is voluntary and consists of three-day seminars conducted by VA, DOD and DOL at military installations for personnel within 90 days of separation. It provides a number of services to assist military personnel in making a smoother transition to civilian life. These services include: employment assistance, such as resume writing and skills marketing; job referral; and other transitional services.

Military services coordinators (MSCs) were appointed at each VA regional office with some coordinators placed near large military populations. Some of them work fulltime on military coordinating duties. MSCs and other VA benefits counselors participate in TAP and DTAP seminars and personal interviews.

They also conduct benefit briefings at other military pre-separation and retirement programs and are involved in outreach to members of the Reserve and National Guard units. The MSCs and counselors work directly with offices on military installations providing education, medical, family and personal counseling, and casualty assistance.

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Worldwide Services

Concerned that military personnel overseas have less access to information about veterans benefits than their stateside counterparts, VA and DOD began in 1992 to provide briefings to personnel stationed in Europe, the Far East, Panama, and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. In the years that followed, VA transition activities in the European theater were expanded, as were visits in the Far East.

VA currently has counselors assigned in Germany, England, Italy, Korea, Japan, and on Okinawa. Circuit-traveling service provides periodic briefings in Spain, Iceland, the Azores and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Benefits Delivery at Discharge

This joint VA-DOD initiative is helping service members file for and receive service-connected disability compensation benefits more quickly than in the past. The goal is to adjudicate claims within 30 days of discharge by examining servicemembers under VA protocols as part of the discharge process. By comparison, VA's national average processing time is 163 days for claims requiring a disability rating.

In the Benefits Delivery at Discharge program, the medical information needed to begin the VA file carries over from DoD to VA seamlessly. In addition, if a service member is found to be disabled, additional applicable vocational and employment services may be initiated in a timely manner.

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